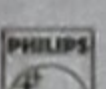


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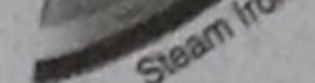
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2 Slice Toaster



Steam Iron



Frenetic election campaign grips Jhalakati

Ministers, senior leaders canvass for Amu

From Shehab Ahmed and Aroop Talukder

NALCHITI, July 27: Never before has this sleepy, remote corner of the country seen so many Pajero four wheelers and microbuses carrying ministers and ruling party stalwarts as they covered every nook and corner of the area seeking vote for Awami League heavyweight Amir Hossain Amu.

What otherwise would have been a dull, routine by-election in the Jhalakati-2 parliamentary seat, which the mainstream opposition parties have shunned, has become the centre of attention. The seat fell vacant after the death of Jatiya Party (Mizan-Manju) MP, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

His widow Elen Bhutto poses the biggest challenge for Amu who was made food minister from technocrat quota a few months ago.

With only three days to the election, a tireless Amu, aided by ministers, party colleagues and relatives, is campaigning door to door. Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad was among many who made it through a slippery road to Manpasha today after arriving here in the morning.

Manpasha happens to be stronghold of Bhutto. She is making a silent, virtually invisible campaign there as she knows she should have the sympathy of the electorate.

That makes it all the more important for Amu to win there. He is promising along with all the ministers and stalwarts a balanced development of the remotest corner of the country.

"Development would roll down the road, something we would like to do as a mark of respect for late Bhutto," said To-fail Ahmed yesterday.

"This area never had a minister in all these years. So we want him to do something," said Parvez Hossain, a contractor sipping tea at Nalchiti bazar.

However, that is something time will decide. Meantime, election fever in the constituency is running very high.

All over the area, at least five types of posters of Amu have been slapped. Islamic Biplobi Andolon has sponsored one such poster.

Elen Bhutto, in sharp contrast, has only one poster printed in black and white, calling upon her husband's supporters to elect her to finish the development works the late lawmaker began.

However, the poster with her portrait alongside her husband's with television as poll symbol could be seen only at Nalchiti bazar and at the ferry ghat at Shatpakiya on river Sugandha.

Some of them were torn, prompting Elen to lodge complaint with the Election Commission, accusing local thana OC and other policemen of aiding and abetting in the act.

"We're apprehending trouble and muscle-flexing. Already a cousin of Elen had been threatened, Mobarak Hossain, Union Parishad Chairman of Bhasanda, Jhalakati, has warned the local people not to vote for her (Elen). Iqbal Hossain and Hannan Shikder, supporters of Elen, were kidnapped," said Razak bin Palash, who was preparing for a meeting of the local chapter of the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance at the local school.

But the chairman was not available for his comments. Police said Iqbal has been freed.

The Election Commission, however, is not taking any chances although the campaign has virtually been a top-sided affair with Elen Bhutto occasionally holding rallies and moving from door to door in a low profile campaign.

The EC has received some complaints. It is going to have 212 magistrates, 67 from Barisal Division, 50 BDR and Armed Forces teams, and 39 teams of special police forces stationed on the election day.

Election Commissioner Abidur Rahman has already visited Barisal and Jhalakati while Chief Election Commissioner M A Syed, facing his first poll test since his appointment recently, will visit the constituency on the election day.

EC warns Amu

The Election Commission yesterday warned Amir Hossain Amu, the ruling party candidate in Jhalakati by-election, against violation of the code of conduct, reports UNB.

The warning came as Amu, the sitting Food Minister, violated Section 5 (13) and 5 (11) of the election code of conduct by using loudspeaker and writings on the wall during the campaign, said an official handout.

EC asked him to refrain from violating the code of conduct. Otherwise, he will be penalised.

Power generation reaches all-time high

By Staff Correspondent

Different plants of the Power Development Board (PDB) generated 2,822 megawatts (MW) of electricity yesterday, a new high.

The PDB sources said the power generation level was even with yesterday's peak power demand of 2820 MW.

This new power generation level was possible as the 210 MW second unit at Raazan plant resumed operations Wednesday. This unit was out of order for several months due to a major technical fault, a result of mishandling by the plant's operators.

"PDB's power generation performance is improving steadily for the last one month," said a PDB source, "however, power supply in Dhaka continues to be disturbing because the power distribution system here is poor."

Two on remand in connection with plot to kill PM

By Staff Correspondent

The two alleged members of Harkatul Jihad, who were arrested on Wednesday in connection with plotting of two bombs at Kotlaipara to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, were placed on a four-day remand yesterday.

They are Hafez Moulana Abul Hasan of village Bhojerati village under Kotlaipara thana in Gopalganj district and Hafez Moulana Abu Taher of Basila in Hazaribagh area in the city. They were produced before the CMM's court yesterday.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Driven by dengue dread, students and teachers at the Viquarunnisa Noon School and College went for a cleaning drive in and around the campus yesterday. Star photo

Crowded commerce ministry

Half the staff is redundant, claims a top official

By Rafiq Hasan

The Ministry of Commerce is overstuffed, 50 per cent of them do not have any work and the parliamentary standing committee on commerce ministry was told yesterday.

Efficiency of the ministry would increase if the staff were reduced by 50 per cent, the committee was further informed.

"There are so many people in the ministry that I do not know who is doing what," Additional Secretary in-charge of the ministry Fazlul Haq said at a briefing session for the standing committee at the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

The briefing session was organised to apprise the members of committee about various efforts of the EPB to increase export earning of the country.

Chairman of the standing committee Razi Uddin Ahmed Razu and its members including Mohibur Rahman Manik, Master Majibur Rahman, Akhter Hamid Siddiqui and Prof Shahidul Islam attended the briefing.

EPB Vice-chairman A B Chowdhury and other high officials of the bureau were present.

The additional secretary asked EPB officials to visit the ministry frequently and get their work done for increasing export of the country. "A ministry has nothing to do but create working atmosphere for various organisations under it," he said.

The standing committee members underscored the need for gearing up EPB's efforts for increasing export earning. They criticised the commercial counsellors at various foreign missions of the country for failure to expand the country's export base and export earnings.

They stressed the need for a comprehensive policy framework regarding the country's strategy to face the challenges in garments and textile sector after expiry of the quota regime in 2004.

"Most of the commercial counsellors at Bangladesh Missions abroad are inefficient. They should be recalled immediately and replaced by officials with experience of working for export sector," said Prof Shahidul Islam.

He observed that Bangladesh should keep trade representatives only in those countries with potential for business expansion. He also criticised the 'trend' of appointing officials in the EPB on deputation or on temporary basis.

Honest and dedicated officials should be appointed for long time, he said, adding that "This vital organisation for increasing and expanding ex-

port should be run by professionals."

Master Majibur Rahman suggested the EPB to make a concrete proposal for expanding its network. "Make elaborate proposals on how trade could be increased and we would make necessary recommendations to the commerce ministry," he said.

A B Chowdhury referred to different problems faced by exporters. He also pointed out the problems and limitations of the EPB. "Non availability of funds, high rate of bank interest, procedural bottlenecks and price fluctuation in international market are the problems cited by most of the exporters," he said.

Most of the banks were reluctant to provide long term industrial loans, Chowdhury said. Lack of funds is one of the main reasons why backward linkage industries are not developing in the country. More than Tk100 crore is needed for setting up a composite textile mill but hardly any bank would provide that much money, he added.

The EPB vice-chairman said most of the director-level officials of the EPB did not get promotion in the last 15 years. "They need promotion and incentives for hard work."

Tea plantation on plain

Increasing domestic demand forces BTB to turn to Panchagarh, also CHT

By Reaz Ahmad, back from Srimangal

Bangladesh plans tea plantation also in its northern region and Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to increase tea production and retain the market share in tea export, sources in Bangladesh Tea Board (BTB) said.

As BTB has put proposals before the government to expand tea plantation beyond the traditional tea growing areas — Sylhet and Chittagong — some enthusiastic entrepreneurs have already bought lands in Panchagarh for this.

BTB has already conducted a study on prospect of tea plantation in Panchagarh and CHT and submitted a Tk nine crore project for consideration of the government.

As rapid rise in domestic tea consumption is greatly reducing exportable surplus of the commodity, BTB has taken up a

two-pronged strategy to augment production of tea — plantation in new areas and development of drought resistant tea clones.

On an average, Bangladesh earns Tk 200 crore per annum from tea export and currently holds 8th position among tea exporting countries in the world.

The earning from tea export dipped to around Tk 100 crore in 1999 from Tk 200 crore in 1997, partly because of rapid rise in domestic demand and partly because of production loss due to drought last year.

Tea production fell to 47 million kilograms in 1999 from 51 million kg in the year before as a severe drought caused damage to tea plants, managers of some tea gardens said.

Against this backdrop,

Bangladesh Tea Research Institute (BTRI) in Srimangal released two new drought and pest resistant tea clones on Monday.

Talking to a group of newsmen, BTRI Director AFM Badrul Alam said,

"BT 12 and BT 13 (the two new clones) will withstand drought and pest."

BTRI is now supplying the two new tea clones to tea estates. All the 158 tea gardens in the country would get 10 plants each for 'multiplication' in the gardens.

Of the 158 tea gardens, 134 are in greater Sylhet, 22 in Chittagong, one each in Rangamati and Brahmanbaria. Of these, local companies own 55 gardens while companies incorporated in the United Kingdom own 25 gardens, individuals own 62 gardens. National

See page 11 col 8

Speight may face treason charges

SUVA, July 27: George Speight, who toppled Fiji's elected government in a two-month hostage standoff, may be charged with treason for threatening the life of the country's new president, the military said Thursday, reports AP.

Speight was arrested at a military checkpoint overnight along with three key advisers and a bodyguard, the first step in a crackdown on the rebels who for weeks stirred civil unrest across the country.

"We are going to the root of the matter, we are arresting the people who orchestrated the whole campaign of civil unrest in this country," Tarakini said in a news conference.

He said Speight's arrest followed reports that his group had threatened the life of President Ratu Josefa Iloilo, and had breached an agreement with the military to return all weapons used in the coup, which began May 19 when Speight led an armed gang into Parliament and took dozens of lawmakers hostage.

Tarakini said Iloilo was threatened in connection with Speight's desire to have his supporters installed in the interim government.

"That in itself can be seen as an act of treason," he said. In the first sign of retaliation against Speight's arrest, rebel supporters took two expatriate New Zealand pilots

DPRK joins ASEAN Regional Forum

BANGKOK, July 27: North Korea ended decades of international isolation today and joined Asia's leading security forum, raising hope that its opening to the world can bring improve regional peace, reports AP.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright hoped to pry open the door further Friday in the highest-level meeting between American and North Korean officials in a half-century of hostility.

Albright planned to seek clarification from North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun of the North's recent offer to curb its ballistic missile programme and use it for the peaceful launch of satellites.

The talks have been described by the State Department as introductory and no major deals are expected.

US officials have said that Washington could accept North Korean satellites being launched from neutral sites, such as the South Pacific, but rule out selling boosters or technology that could improve the North's rocketry.

Paek had a whirlwind of meetings over the past two days — including the North's first with a South Korean foreign minister, Lee Jong-binn — and received a big welcome into the regional forum Thursday.

Canada announced diplomatic relations. Australia said it made more sense to have a dialogue than isolate a state that long preferred isolation. Thailand, the host nation, expressed hope that North Korea's entry into the ASEAN Regional Forum would foster regional peace.

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Privatisation Biman employees announce agitation programme

Employees of Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday staged a demonstration in front of 'Balaka Bhaban', Biman's headquarters, protesting the move for conversion of the state owned airlines into a private limited company, reports UNB.

All activities at Biman's head office came to a halt as the employees held a protest rally and prevented staff from entering the office.

CBA leaders announced a week-long agitation programme to protest the privatisation move.

The programme includes a sit-in on Sunday, submission of memorandum to Biman MD on Monday, sit-in again on Tuesday and demonstration in all Biman offices on Thursday.

"We would not allow the government to privatise Biman. If necessary, we'll go for tougher programme to stop the privatisation move," said CBA president Mohiuddin Ahmed at the rally.

The union leaders termed the move as "a conspiracy of some bureaucrats." Biman Employees Union general secretary SM Belal Hossain, Biman Sramik League president Habibur Rahman Khan and Bangladesh Biman Sramik Union general secretary M Solaiman also spoke at the rally.

The airlines decided to go for privatisation, offloading 49 per cent shares. Nine per cent of the shares would go to the employees and 40 per cent to the strategic partner.

Prayer Timings

July 28

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-25	4-55
Juma	12-45	1-30
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-55	6-58
Esha	8-15	8-45

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